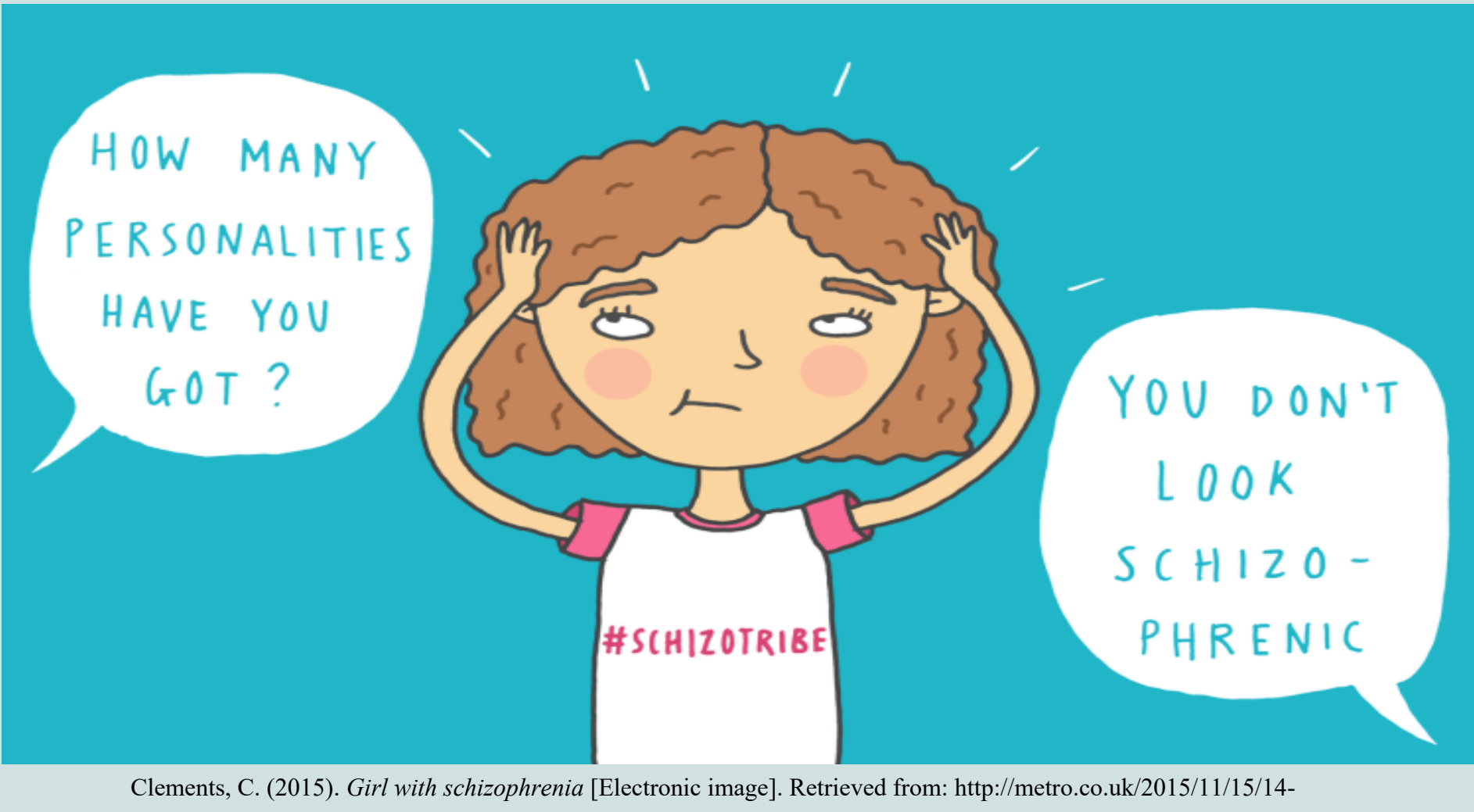




# Myths in Schizophrenia

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## Introduction

Myths surrounding schizophrenia are abundant, contributing to it being one of the most misunderstood mental disorders (Curtis & Kelley, 2016). Myths contribute to public stigmatization which can affect the lives of those with schizophrenia in a negative way (Zvonkovic & Lucas-Thompson, 2015). Different sources of influence are responsible for the development of these myths, including TV and movies, Internet and social media; however, personal experiences, education within the field, and previous biases also play a hand in what people believe (Curtis & Kelley, 2016).

## Method

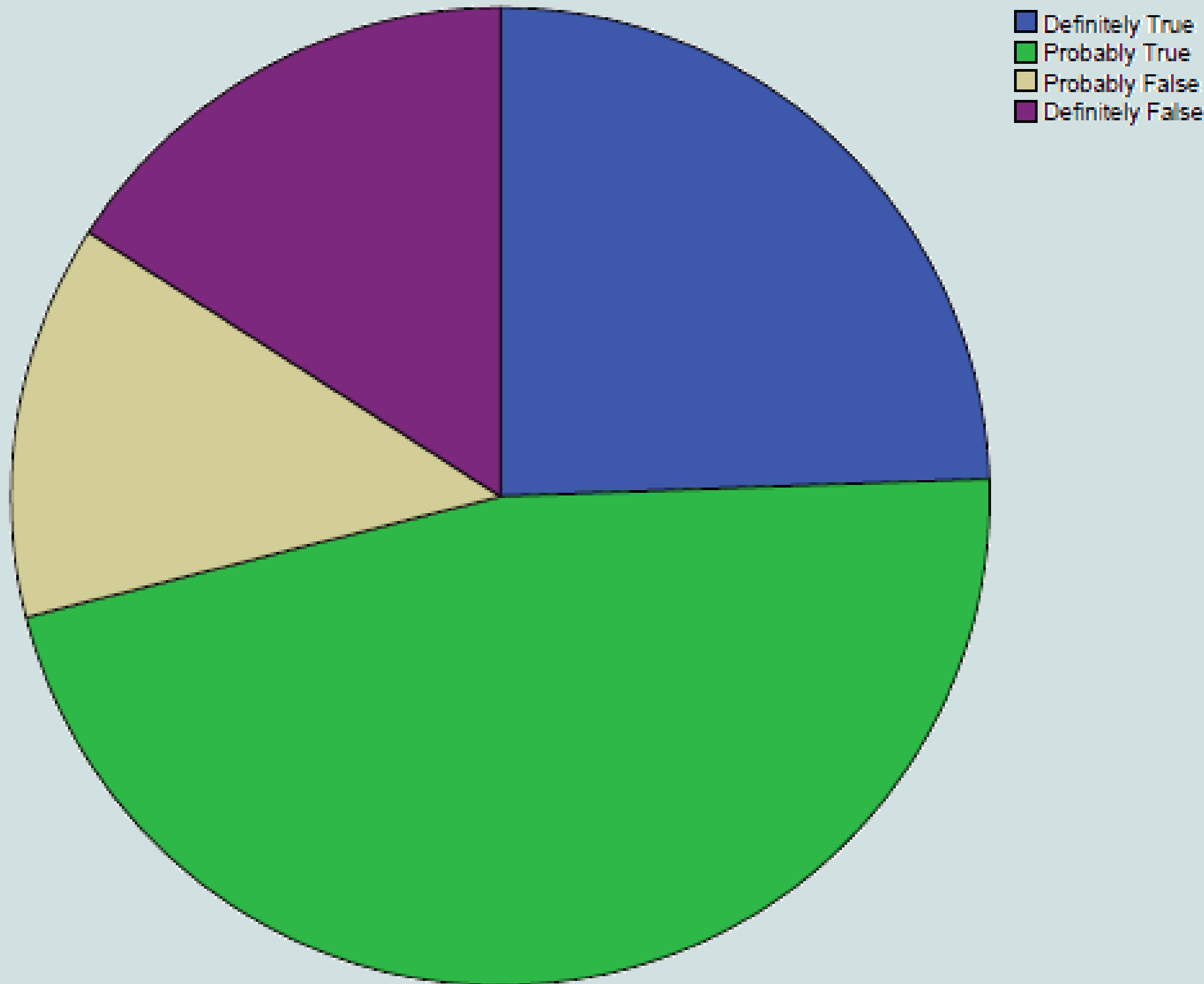
There were 178 individuals recruited from an undergraduate psychology program and through Facebook. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 ( $M = 20.86$ ,  $SD = 6.15$ ) and were mostly female (80.9%) and Caucasian/European American (53.4%). Participants answered a demographic survey and the Myths of Schizophrenia Questionnaire (MSQ) developed by Lindberg (2017). The MSQ is a 28-item questionnaire adapted from the research based off myths from Curtis and Kelley (2016), Harding and Zahniser (1994), and Zvonkovic and Lucas-Thompson (2015). The first 15 items asked participants to indicate whether the myth was true or false on a Likert scale (Definitely True = 1, Probably True = 2, Probably False = 3, or Definitely False = 4). Participants then answered if they have seen or heard the phrase, “I used to be schizophrenic, but we are all okay now”, and then the next 10 items asked participants to indicate level of agreement (Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly agree = 7) of where they have heard the myths or why they believe the myths. Participants were then asked to provide up to three myths that were not listed on the MSQ.

## Myths Endorsed

Items were summed into a total correct score for the 15 myth items, based on items answered as definitely true or definitely false. Frequency analyses revealed that participants average score was 35% ( $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = 3.55$ ). There was not a statistically significant differences in correct scores between undergraduate psychology students and participants from Facebook,  $t(176) = -1.06$ ,  $p = .29$ . Frequency analysis of individual items revealed that the majority of participants endorsed four myths. Most participants (70%) believed that schizophrenia is definitely or probably synonymous with Dissociative Identity Disorder and most (55%) believed that the auditory hallucinations of individuals with schizophrenia are definitely or probably their other personalities. Over half of participants (55%) believed that individuals with schizophrenia are definitely or probably more likely to be a danger to others than to themselves. A majority of participants (65.8%) believed, definitely or probably, that if a parent or relative has schizophrenia, then one is more genetically predisposed to develop it and will develop it sometime in their life. Most participants (76%) reported that they have not heard the phrase, “I used to be schizophrenic, but we are all okay now.”

Some qualitative responses, asking participants to write three myths they have heard about schizophrenia, include “schizophrenia are dangerous and out of control” and “all people with schizophrenia need to be hospitalized.”

Schizophrenia is synonymous with Dissociative Identity Disorder (also known as Multiple Identity Disorder).



## Sources of Influence

A repeated measures MANOVA, with students and Facebook as a between subjects variable, was conducted to test participants’ sources of influence, revealing a statistically significant difference across sources of influence,  $F(9, 154) = 2.52$ ,  $p = .01$ , Wilk’s Lambda = 0.87,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Movies or television shows ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) and Internet or social media ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) were rated as having the most influence on effecting contributing to public perceptions of myths schizophrenia. Facebook respondents ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 1.420$ ) were more likely than undergraduate psychology students ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.731$ ) to have heard statements in the MSQ from others. Facebook respondents ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.733$ ) were more likely than undergraduate psychology students ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.611$ ) to believe statements in the MSQ because of personal experiences.

## Conclusions

The current results reveal that people’s conceptualization of schizophrenia does not accurately reflect the disorder. While people correctly identified some information about schizophrenia, several myths were endorsed. Further, many people indicate that their source of information has largely been movies and the internet. Evaluating public perceptions of myths about schizophrenia can be helpful for mental health practitioners in addressing schizophrenia education and treatment. These myths can affect conceptualization of the disorder, creating ineffectual and/or harmful treatments, incorrect diagnoses and social stigma (Harding & Zahniser, 1994). Assessing these myths can also be helpful for instructors debunking the myths for the new generation of students preparing to become mental health professionals.